

The Primary Election

Last year Washington State’s blanket primary was ruled unconstitutional. The state sought to keep our 70-year old system intact and appealed the decision to the United States Supreme Court, which refused to hear our case. Consequently, the Legislature was forced to adopt a new form of primary election.

After many drafts and long debates, the Legislature passed the “top two” qualifying primary. Under this system voters can choose any candidate in any race on the primary ballot, regardless of party, and the two candidates with the most votes advance to the November general election. Party registration is not required or recorded.

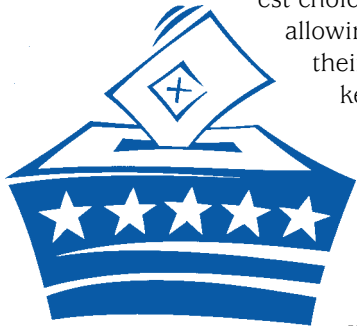
At first glance, this appears to most closely resemble our old method, but the similarities quickly disappear upon closer examination. For example, while “cross-over” voting was permitted under the old system, only one candidate from each major and minor party could advance to the general election. In a “top two” system, it is conceivable – indeed, probable in some districts - that two candidates from the same party will advance. In my opinion, this is not only anti-democratic, it also disenfranchises voters by limiting the choices in the general election — when most people go to the polls. This is why I voted against the bill.

But Governor Locke vetoed the “top two” section of the bill, leaving in place the back-up plan, which is often described as the “Montana style” primary.

Under this system, voters are required to “affiliate” rather than “register” with one of the major parties when they get their ballot, and will be permitted to vote only for one party in all partisan races but for any candidate in non-partisan races. No record is made of voters’ party affiliations. Non-affiliating Independents and minor parties would not participate in the primary election, but would advance candidates directly to the general election through nominating conventions.

I find that the “Montana” primary achieves results that are most similar to those of our old system. Ironically, by limiting the options available on the primary election ballot, this method preserves the broadest choices for voters in November. Moreover, by allowing voters to self-affiliate with a political party of their choosing, the “Montana” system provides the key constitutional requirement of “association” that led to the elimination of our blanket primary system.

I agree with the governor: the “Montana style” primary offers Washington voters meaningful choices, protects our privacy and, most importantly, represents our best option to withstand a constitutional challenge in court.



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End of Session
Report
to the 37th District

Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos

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End of Session Report to the 37th District

Rep. Sharon
Tomiko Santos



May 2004

Dear Neighbor:

I am pleased to share with you this brief overview of the accomplishments of the recent Legislative session. Although it was a “short” 60-day session, we successfully completed the most pressing tasks for 2004: passing a supplemental operating budget and adopting a new primary election system.

In this newsletter, you’ll find some highlights of the supplemental budget so you can see where your tax dollars are going and how we’re putting them to work.

As I mentioned in my previous newsletter, I have three clear priorities:

- investing in education
- making health care more affordable
- improving the economy with good paying jobs

We met many important objectives in each of these areas and, while there is still much to do, I am satisfied that we made measurable progress through this budget.

This session we had to replace our blanket primary system. I worked for having an election model that would preserve voter choices, ensure voter privacy, and pass constitutional review. In my estimation, the bill that was signed into law most fully meets these criteria.

As always, I am honored to represent you in Olympia. Please stay in touch by calling, e-mailing, or writing to me about the issues that concern you. Thank you for your continued interest and involvement in our state government.

Sincerely,

Sharon Tomiko Santos
State Representative

Keeping in touch

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The Supplemental Budget

Unlike the biennial budget that is adopted in every odd-numbered year, the supplemental budget makes minor adjustments in response to changes in our state’s fiscal and caseload projections.

Our economy has improved so the state’s revenue forecast is stronger too. In addition, the federal government provided much needed fiscal relief to the states. These factors – as well as government savings – allowed the Legislature to mitigate some of the \$2.6 billion in cuts and reductions that were part of the original budget adopted last year.

The carefully-crafted bipartisan budget restores some health and human services, makes intelligent investments in our economy, and keeps \$305 million in reserve to respond to emergencies.

Adopted Supplemental Budget	
	\$ <u>Millions</u>
Resources:	
+ Beginning Balance	404.6
+ Revenue Forecast	22,897.3
+ Adjustments (includes Federal Relief and Fund Transfers) ...	309.4
+ Total Resources, the Beginning Fund Balance:	23,611.3
Appropriations and Spending:	
- Biennial Appropriations	(23,081.4)
- 2004 Supplemental Appropriations	(144.8)
- 2004 Tax Policy Spending	(80.0)
Total Appropriations and Spending:	(23,306.2)
New Ending Fund Balance:	305.1

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Jobs and the Economy

While positioning Washington workers and businesses for expanded economic opportunities in the future, we also worked to hold onto the good jobs that are already here.

One of the major jobs-related bills that I supported was the Home Health Care Workers contract, which provides a 50-cent pay increase to the hard-working and selfless men and women who help bathe, dress, and feed thousands of Washington residents needing assistance in these activities.

Tax *incentives* are another tool that can stimulate the economy and create jobs. However, as I discussed in my earlier newsletter, we need to make sure these incentives actually strengthen businesses *and* put people to work in our state. Regrettably, some measures I introduced to require accountability did not survive the session.

I will continue to promote legislation that requires companies to tell us how many jobs are created or retained as a result of the tax incentives, limits the total value of these public subsidies, and requires the governor to include the value of tax exemptions as a debit to the state’s balance sheet.

As you can see in this chart, the Legislature approved \$80 million in tax expenditures that do provide greater *transparency* and *accountability* by requiring stricter reporting on the public benefits derived and also limit their duration. Examples include:

- Extending the sales tax exemption and the Business and Occupation (B&O) tax credit for high-tech industries to 2015. Requiring companies to report the annual value of the tax incentive received; the number of new products developed, the number of full-time and part-time jobs created; wages by salary group; and other benefits provided.
- Extending the sales tax deferral to 2010 and the B&O tax credit to 2011 for manufacturing, computer programming, information technology, and research and development businesses operating in rural counties and in economically distressed areas.

Education

The key to our future is firmly rooted in the quality of our public education system, from pre-K through college. As a member of the House Education committee, I am particularly focused on ensuring that our elementary and secondary schools help *every child – without exception* – to achieve academic success.

We bolstered this goal by passing education reforms that provide students and schools with tools and opportunities to be successful. The budget supports new policies that:

- Help students graduate from high school by providing multiple opportunities to pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and by developing alternative assessments.
- Improve the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) by changing how resources are distributed to schools and districts and by encouraging the use of data in developing more effective programs to assist struggling students.
- Help districts better meet the needs of students by allowing the full amount of levy dollars authorized by the local taxpayers to be collected.

We also expanded access to higher education and job retraining opportunities that prepare students and retool workers to succeed in a globally competitive economic environment by providing:

- 3,000 more general enrollments at our colleges and universities
- Increased financial aid for college students, and Promise Scholarships for high-school graduates
- New enrollments in high demand fields such as nursing, engineering, computing, information technology, and special education



Health Care

People without health care insurance are less likely to access preventive health services and are more often diagnosed with serious illnesses at an advanced stage. Children and seniors are especially vulnerable to the consequences of inadequate health care.

The budget provides relief for our most urgent health care needs, including:

- State grants to hospitals like Harborview Medical Center, and community clinics, which serve the uninsured without compensation
- Removing the Medicaid premium that would have eliminated health care coverage for up to 20,000 of Washington’s poorest children
- Restoring some of the cuts made to mental health services
- Increasing state support for nursing home residents



Human Services

During this period of high anxiety about the well-being of our families here and overseas, human service providers and volunteers have stretched meager resources to meet increasing demand. The state continues its partnership with community-based agencies by:

- Leveraging private dollars to support transitional housing and linking homeless families to supportive services
- Maintaining employment support services such as community voice-mail for job-seekers who do not own a phone and vocational training support for limited-English speaking people in transition from welfare to work
- Creating a local funding mechanism for domestic violence advocacy, prevention and prosecution programs and by providing some funds for domestic violence shelters
- Ensuring equal access to the justice system and civil legal services for low-income individuals who cannot afford to hire private counsel
- Improving the foster care system so children can be placed in the homes of relatives and so families can participate in decisions affecting those children